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SUBJECT: VIETNAM: THE DEPUTY SECRETARY'S VISIT TO HIV/AIDS HOSPITAL

1. Summary: The Deputy Secretary visited the National Institute for Clinical Research and Tropical Medicine (NICRTM) at Hanoi's Bach Mai Hospital on May 6 to learn about its programs for the care, treatment and identification of people living with HIV/AIDS. Hospital and program directors gave brief presentations about the hospital, the HIV/AIDS inpatient and outpatient care programs and the voluntary counseling and testing centers. They thanked the United States for selecting Vietnam as one of fifteen focus countries in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The Deputy Secretary noted that Bach Mai Hospital's HIV/AIDS program is the cornerstone of HIV/AIDS activities in Vietnam and said that its success will help in ongoing prevention efforts. He briefly toured the inpatient ward and presented gifts of powdered milk and books to AIDS patients. Twenty members of the international and Vietnamese press covered the Deputy Secretary's visit to Bach Mai. End Summary.

2. The Deputy Secretary met with Vice Minister of Health Le Ngoc Trong; Director of Bach Mai Hospital Dr. Tran Quy; Director of the National Institute for Clinical Research and Tropical Medicine (NICRTM) Professor Nguyen Duc Hien; representatives of the Therapy, International Cooperation and Preventive Medicine Departments of the Ministry of Health; and, staff at the Bach Mai Hospital, Hanoi, Vietnam. The purpose of the visit was to learn about their programs for the care, treatment and identification of people living with HIV/AIDS.

3. Representing the Minister of Health, Vice Minister Trong welcomed the Deputy Secretary. He noted that this visit demonstrated the interest of the United States in the health and welfare of the Vietnamese people. He thanked the United States for selecting Vietnam as one of fifteen PEPFAR Focus Countries and urged close collaboration between the United States and Vietnam to meet the goals both of Vietnam's National Strategy to Combat HIV/AIDS and PEPFAR. Doctors Quy, Hien and staff followed with descriptions of Bach Mai Hospital and its HIV/AIDS programs.

4. Dr. Quy briefed that Bach Mai hospital, established in 1911, is now the largest hospital in Vietnam. It employs more than 2,000 health care workers. Within this hospital, the National Institute for Clinical Research and Tropical Medicine is responsible for the care and treatment of patients with HIV/AIDS. The hospital also operates a separate Voluntary Counseling and Testing Center (VCT). Funding for the development and operation of the inpatient and outpatient programs as well as the VCT center comes, in part, from the President's Emergency Plan.

5. Dr. Hien noted that the NICRTM inpatient program was established in 1989. It treats 300-400 HIV/AIDS patients each year. The program initiated antiretroviral therapy (ART) in 1997; approximately 80 patients are now on ART, funded by the Ministry of Health. Dr. Hien emphasized that PEPFAR funds will greatly increase the number of AIDS patients who will be able to receive ART. The NICRTM outpatient program was established in December 2003. It is supported by PEPFAR through the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Since then, more than 1,110 patients have received clinical care, lab tests, treatment for opportunistic infections and counseling. NICRTM also trains staff from Bach Mai Hospital and others in the care and treatment of HIV/AIDS patients, including the administration of ARTs.

6. Dr. Hien said that since its opening in February 2003, the Bach Mai VCT Center has served more than 5,300 clients, of whom more than 23 percent have tested HIV positive. Center services include testing for HIV infection (laboratory services), counseling and referrals to other hospital services. PEPFAR funds this project through USAID. This program provides staff training, quality assurance and outreach.

7. The Deputy Secretary closed the one-hour program by noting that Bach Mai Hospital HIV/AIDS program is the cornerstone of HIV/AIDS activities in Vietnam. Bach Mai's success will help in ongoing prevention efforts in Vietnam. The Deputy

Secretary predicted that the USD 25 million dedicated to

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HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment through PEPFAR will grow. PEPFAR will help the United States and Vietnam broaden the base of the bilateral relationship. He concluded by thanking the hospital staff for their hard work and commitment to treating and caring for patients with HIV/AIDS.

BOARDMAN